DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 405 076 PS 023 878

AUTHOR	Powell, Douglas R.
TITLE	Parenting: Supporting Parents within a Family Literacy Perspective. Even Start Project Manager's Guide.
INSTITUTION	RMC Research Corp., Portsmouth, NH.
SPONS AGENCY	Department of Education, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	95
NOTE	16p.; For other Even Start series papers, see PS 023 877, PS 024 787, and PS 024 789-790.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Administrators; *Child Development; Disadvantaged Youth; *Family Life; Family Programs; Literacy Education; Lower Class Students; *Parent Education; Parenting Skills; *Parents as Teachers; Partnerships in Education; Social Agencies; Social Networks; Social Services; Social Support Groups
IDENTIFIERS	*Even Start; Family Literacy; *Family Support

ABSTRACT

A significant portion of Even Start's efforts are directed toward helping families support their young children's education. The quality of the home environment contributes to children's success in school. To improve the quality of this environment, Even Start concentrates on five major aspects of family life which can affect children's school performance: (1) parents' understanding of child development and children's abilities; (2) parent teaching strategies; (3) the extent to which the home is developed as an early literacy environment; (4) parental control and methods of discipline; and (5) family dynamics. Stress, the amount of familial support, early family experiences, child characteristics, and stage of parenthood all contribute to parenting styles and effects on children. Even Start efforts must begin where parents are, encourage parent discussion, use multiple interventions, and maintain a balanced focus. To accomplish program goals, managers of Even Start programs need to develop experiences appropriate to the clients, include children, and respect and learn from parents. (JW)

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Parenting

Supporting Parents Within a Family Literacy Perspective

BY DOUGLAS R. POWELL, PURDUE UNIVERSITY

One in a Series of Papers for Even Start Project Managers

Commissioned by the US Department of Education

Developed by RMC Research Corporation

1996

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Supporting parents within a family literacy perspective

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Even Start leads the current thinking about how best to enable healthy families to support the education of their young children. Program designers were wise to include a major component on parenting because children's futures are directly tied to the quality of today's family environments, including parents beliefs and practices. Program designers also were on target to include program components that address various educational needs of adults and children. A focus on parenting alone cannot be the sole answer to the educational problems facing disadvantaged populations. At the same time, parenting cannot be ignored or given a secondary role in a comprehensive educational program aimed at families. As shown in the recent evaluation of Even Start, the amount of time spent in the parenting component was associated with program gains.

The key question facing managers of Even Start programs is relatively new in the field of parent education: What are the best ways to support individuals in their parenting role within a program that addresses other child and adult needs? Managers of stand-alone parent education programs have not had to address this question seriously. Even Start's great opportunity is to support parenting within a family literacy perspective. This approach provides an important focus on parenting and meaningful involvement in the parent-child relationship. Fortunately, research offers some good clues about how to maximize Even Start's advantage.

UNDERSTANDING PARENTHOOD

What child-rearing beliefs and practices of parents contribute to their children's academic and intellectual competence? Why do parents rear children in the ways they do? Answers to these questions are starting points for thinking about ways to support the parent role of adults in Even Start programs.

Parent Contributions to Children's Competence. Children's success in school has been found to be associated with the quality of the home environment in the early years of life (for a review, see Powell, 1995). The research evidence is solid, although the influence of mothers has been studied a lot more than the influence of fathers on children's school success.

There are five major ways that early family environments contribute to children's school performance. Each of these areas is described below. No one area has been found to be more significant than others in predicting children's school success. This means that Even Start programs must focus on a range of parenting dimensions, and not deal with one aspect of parenting exclusively. There are no "magic bullets."

Understanding of Child Development. There are many different views of how children develop. The

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most beneficial views recognize the child as an active participant in his or her own development, and not in a passive role like a computer to be programmed or a piece of clay to be molded. Children's development is strengthened when they are given good opportunities to explore and actively manipulate objects and ideas. Research suggests that children's intellectual competence is strengthened when their parents have a view of child development that acknowledges the child as a major contributor, actively experimenting with things and words rather than passively absorbing information from some other source.

Understanding of Child's Abilities. Children's academic performance is better when mothers hold accurate understandings about their child's intellectual abilities. The idea here is that when parents know their child's abilities and interests, they are more likely to create environments that appropriately challenge their child. The message to parents is to know your child rather than impose interests or expectations that do not stem from the child's level and interests. Sometimes parents expect too much or too little of their child. This can lead to too much pressure or not enough encouragement for the child to learn new information and skills.

Children, like adults, learn best when they are engaged in an activity of keen interest to them. The task for parents is to build on a child's special interests by nudging the child toward greater levels of skill or knowledge. A child's interest in making things in the kitchen, for example, can progress from identifying ingredients such as flour and sugar to actually measuring the amounts needed of each ingredient. Because children's interests and abilities change rapidly, it is important for parents to constantly adjust their understandings and expectations of their child.

Parents' Teaching Strategies. In general, research shows that the most beneficial parental teaching strategies stimulate the child's own thinking and encourage active, verbal involvement in a task. Asking questions of children especially open-ended questions also has been found to be beneficial to children's school-related outcomes. Here are some examples of open-ended questions: What are you doing? How are they different? How do you like the way it looks? What might happen if you do that? Do you think it would work someplace else? Open questions usually require a lot more thinking on the part of the child (and the person asking the question!) than when a child is told the answer ("These two are different because...."). Imagine these questions in slow motion: What are the steps the child needs to go through to answer an open question? How might these steps strengthen a child's ability to solve problems?

Early Literacy Environments. Parents' contributions to children's reading skills are both direct and indirect. Among the indirect influences are making sure children have access to reading and writing materials, including such resources as picture dictionaries and alphabet books, and parents serving as role models of good reading habits. Parents enforcement of rules about television viewing also has been found to be associated with children's level of interest in literature.

Parents' direct contributions to children's reading skill focus on the quantity and quality of parents reading *with* their child. It is important for parents to actively involve their child in the reading, such as holding the book, turning the pages, pointing to pictures or words, and having the chance to ask the parent to re-read favorite pages or sections. For younger children, picture books that contain no words can be a great way for a child to make up a story. Children's thinking skills are strengthened when they put together their ideas through words.

It also is valuable for parents to engage their child in conversations about the book they are reading together. This can be done while the story is

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being read as well as after the story is read. Imagine the thinking a child does when answering the following types of questions: What do you think will happen next? Why did the bunny feel sad? What do you think Sam should do?

Control and Discipline. Attentive, warm, and nonrestrictive behaviors of mothers during the early years of life have been found to contribute positively to the intellectual functioning of young children. Also, mothers' use of direct control techniques in teaching and discipline situations with young children has been found to be negatively associated with children's later school-related abilities. Examples of direct control techniques in a teaching situation would be commands such as "Say it" and "Tell me what it is" and "Put it here." These techniques do not encourage children to talk through a problem or to engage in active problem-solving on their own ("Where are some places you could put it that might work best for the plant?").

Examples of direct control techniques in discipline situations would be times when parents demand a certain action or compliance without offering an explanation of the rule or reason: "Sit in that corner." "I would spank her." "Go tell that boy you're sorry." In general, these techniques are less helpful to children than actions that encourage children to think about a situation. A better set of responses from a parent would include the following: "You need to sit in that corner because our rule is that...." "If you take it [medicine], you will get better quickly." (Hess & McDevitt, 1984). The thinking skills that children develop through these everyday situations provide a foundation for effectively solving problems in school and elsewhere.

What Contributes to Parenting?

For Even Start programs to work effectively with parents, they need a general understanding of "where parents are coming from." It is helpful for staff members to have informed ideas about why parents approach child rearing in particular ways. This knowledge helps staff members appreciate the contexts in which parents are functioning; it is always good to have a fuller picture of a situation. An understanding of why parents act the way they do also underscores the need for staff to be patient as well as persistent in helping parents better realize their potential as competent and confident parents.

Stress and Support. The sources of stress and support in a parent's environment have been shown to relate to the quality of parenting. The environment includes friends and extended family members, community values and availability of supportive organizations, adequate housing, food, shelter, and access to health care, and the responsiveness of the work place to family circumstances. A recent study with African-American single mothers of seventh- and eighth-grade children, for example, found that unemployment had a direct effect on maternal depression which in turn was associated with more frequent maternal punishment of children. Punishment, in turn, contributed to distress and depression among the children. However, increased availability of tangible help from others (for example, someone to run errands when mother is ill) was associated with fewer depressive symptoms in the mothers and with less punishment of the children (McLloyd, Jayaratne, Ceballo, & Borquez, 1994).

Early Experiences. How parents were reared as children also has been shown to be related to styles of parenting. The most frequently cited finding here is that parents who abuse and/or neglect their children are more likely to have been mistreated as a child than parents who are not abusive or neglectful. There is not a strong causal linkage; certainly many individuals abused as children do not grow up to be

abusive or neglectful of their own children. Early experiences with nurturance and authority figures, however, appear to be part of the good and sometimes not-so-good "baggage" that parents often bring to their parenting role.

Child Characteristics. Characteristics of the child have been shown to influence parenting behavior. Examples of these characteristics include chronic illness and a disability such as a communication impairment. Consider a parent's experience in communicating with an infant, for example, where the infant does not respond quickly or fully to a parent's smiles, gentle pokes, and kisses. In instances where a child is not a good communications partner, special demands are placed on the parent for initiating and following through with interactions.

Are these influences so powerful that it is futile for a program like Even Start to assume it can have an impact on parenting? Certainly not. An individual's development across the life course is not cast in stone. The information and experiences available in a comprehensive family education and support program such as Even Start have the potential to refine and sometimes redirect the pathways of individuals and families. An understanding of where parents are coming from is a first step in this direction.

Stages of Parenthood. A child's developmental stage contributes to the way a parent behaves and thinks. In fact, a useful way to think about Even Start's approach to parents is to view parenthood as a series of stages, each with its own unique set of tasks. This enables a program to map out the developmental issues facing parents and to make some tentative decisions about program content that is likely to be useful to parents.

The stages of parenthood begin prenatally and continue for life, although less research has been done with the experiences of parenting when children are adults. Because Even Start deals with the early years of a child's life, a brief description of the early stages of parenthood may be helpful (Galinsky, 1981).

In the prenatal stage, parents are typically engaged in image-making about the anticipated child. These images are a way of preparing for the parenthood role; parents can mentally try out different ideas about the child's temperament (easy or difficult?), looks (brown or blue eyes?), and other characteristics. In some ways, it is an initial period of bonding with the child. The second stage encompasses infancy and toddler years, with the parent's primary task focused on nurturance. Here it is important to form a good parent-child attachment, and to permit the increasingly mobile child many opportunities to explore the physical environment while also maintaining safety.

During the preschool years, the main challenge facing parents is to refine the nature of authority over the child. Parents need to decide how much control to exert over the child, including the child's widening social world of peers. A related task is for parents to manage relations with other authority figures in the child's life such as preschool teachers. How to communicate with, support, and have a relationship of equality and respect with a child's teacher involve a number of partnership skills. The early childhood education component of an Even Start program is a good place for parents to develop the understandings and skills needed for this key responsibility of parenthood.

A recurring theme across stages of parenthood is the emphasis on parents' thinking. Consider, for instance, the cognitive demands on parents of reconciling differences between an imagined baby and the real baby, or the task of interpreting values and a view of the world to youngsters who want to know why things happen the way they do (for example, "How come Alex got on the team and I didn't?" "If Alicia can have a new bike then why can't I?" "Why does Mike have to move away?"). The teachable moments with children are learning experiences for parents as well.

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WORKING WITH PARENTS: GUIDELINES FOR PRACTICE

Parenting is a value-laden process that occupies untold amounts of physical and psychological energy. It is not a domain of human behavior and belief that is easily influenced because of its deeply-rooted, pervasive, and central role in the daily lives of most adults. Care must be taken in the methods chosen to work with parents.

Begin Where Parents Are.

Effective programs "begin where the client is." This long-standing principle in the field of education and the human services (Provence, Naylor, & Patterson, 1977) has been applied successfully to parenting and family literacy programs. An analysis of a family literacy program, for example, found that new practices must acknowledge a family's social reality, relate to their daily life experiences, and be seen by the family as something that will improve their lives enough for them to implement changes that may not be supported by immediate family members or friends (Auerbach, 1989).

Programs work best when new information is presented with sensitivity to participants' existing knowledge, concerns, and dreams. Parents are not blank slates upon which educators write a script for being a good parent. New information is processed in relation to current understandings. Research shows that parents hold a variety of beliefs about child development in general and their child in particular (Okagaki & Divecha, 1993). These beliefs become a lens through which new information is examined.

The importance of programs focusing on parent interests and concerns is suggested in an analysis of a variety of home visiting programs (Olds & Kitzman, 1993). Programs appear to be more effective when the parent has good reason to view their child as potentially vulnerable due to such conditions as low birth weight, pre-term birth, or disability. Perhaps a sense of child vulnerability increases parent interest in program content, especially when topics are tailored to parent concerns.

Critical to tap are the parents' views of their situation. While this may seem common sense, the conventional practice of professionals is to assess a client's needs without exploring seriously what the client thinks of a situation or concern. The problem with this approach is that professional and parent may have totally different views of what needs to happen, and progress will be hampered because there is not basic agreement about issues facing the parent.

Needs are identified by individuals through an informal or formal comparison of what is and what ought to be. Reality is compared to a desired or valued state. The goal of what ought to be needs to be central to the parent's wishes and seen as something a parenting program or worker also is concerned about. This shared or common view of program purpose is an essential foundation for effective work with parents. Unless a parent indicates a need exists in a particular area, there may not be a need regardless of what a professional believes (Dunst, Trivette, & Deal, 1988).

Example: The Ready for School Project of Southeastern/Nova University's Mailman Family Center is a home visiting program committed to the idea that program success requires sensitivity to parents' goals for their children (Segal, 1985). Home visitors asked mothers to describe what they wanted to achieve in the program and what their expectations were for their own children. It was discovered that mothers held different views about what was important for children; concerns ranged from discipline to social skills to academic performance. The

information proved to be helpful to home visitors in tailoring curriculum plans to the interests and concerns of individual parents.

Encourage Discussion

Talk is a crucial link between the presentation of ideas in a parenting program and the adoption of ideas by a parent. It is through talk that parents bounce off new ideas against existing beliefs. Talk is a form of digesting new food for thought.

Talking about children and parenting is also a way to reflect on one's own beliefs and practices. This reflection may lead a parent to strengthen a commitment to an existing approach to parenting ("After all this discussion, I now feel good about the way I've been disciplining my child") or may lead a parent to an uneasiness about the existing approach that increases receptivity to new ways of thinking ("Maybe what I'm doing isn't so good.").

Another purpose of discussion is the opportunity for parents to compare different approaches or ideas. One of the goals of most parenting programs is to enable parents to make informed choices about parenting by considering a range of options. Discussion is a good forum for weighing the pros and cons of different choices.

Lastly, talking is a means of enhancing intellectual development. Participation in conversations provides a chance to practice a number of cognitive skills related to problem solving: recalling what has happened, sorting through ideas, organizing what to say, putting words and sentences to mental images, and listening to and thinking about the perspectives of others.

A Parents in Education paper prepared for Even Start recommends that parent education be viewed "more as opportunity for parents to reflect on how they raise children and less as instruction in parenting." The paper notes that parents rarely have "time to reflect on their effectiveness, or hear about how other parents deal with similar situations. Mothers and fathers who are cut off from good ideas about parenting... may readily embrace new ideas if given the chance to hear from other parents and think about them" (Even Start Family Literacy Focus Paper, "Time to Reflect").

This guideline of encouraging discussion – within a parenting group or in a one-to-one arrangement such as home visiting – is an extension of the previous guideline about the importance of understanding parent beliefs. Discussion must be grounded in the parent's realities, and not pursued exclusively at an abstract level. The task is to help parents refine or modify existing ideas to accommodate new perspectives about children, their child, and parenting.

What does research say about the effects of discussion within parenting programs?

Consider the work of the Listening Partners Project in Vermont. This parenting program used dialogue in audiotaped recordings and group discussion to encourage socially isolated, low-income mothers living in rural Vermont to "gain a voice" and become more actively engaged in conceptualizing and interacting with their children in ways that would promote cognitive development and a sense of self-competence (Bond, Belenky, & Weinstock, 1992). An evaluation of the program indicated the program increased participants' perceived social support and the complexity of their understandings of knowledge and its development. There also was evidence to suggest the program participants were more likely to not smoke and to secure a driver's license.

Consider, too, the effects of the MELD program of parent education and support (Powell, 1994). The MELD program is a modified peer self-help group with laypersons as facilitators of twice-

monthly discussions based partly on MELD curriculum materials dealing with child and parent development. A study of the program found that parents who participated in the peer-group discussions underwent positive change in child-rearing beliefs and practices during a two-year period of program participation; there were no changes in parents who did not participate in the program and in another group of parents who received the same parenting information in written form but did not participate in the discussion group.

Example: Most group-based parenting programs provide a break during the regular program time when parents can talk informally with one another. Are the give-and-take conversations during this break time beneficial, or is this "down time" that should be minimized by program staff? Some answers to this important program design question are found in results of a year-long study of what happens during formal and informal meeting times in a group-based parenting program serving low-income families in the Detroit area. In this program, parents gathered in a kitchen during break time and thus the informal break-time talk was called "kitchen talk" (Powell & Eisenstadt, 1988).

It was found that the amount of time devoted to breaks expanded over a one-year period due to parents' preferences for break time. Did the informal exchanges in the kitchen play a positive role in the program? Observations of 101 group meetings over a 12-month period revealed the kitchen talk was not wasted time. It was as stimulating as the staff-directed conversations in the formal meeting time. Parenting topics were explored in depth or in a novel way with about equal frequency in the formal and informal meeting times. The topics of the "kitchen talk" often were an extension of the formal meeting discussion, and therefore provided a more relaxed opportunity to explore new ideas about parenting.

Use Multiple Methods

In the past decade, parenting programs have implemented a basic idea: different types of methods are needed to reach different types of parents. Most programs have moved beyond a "one size fits all" assumption, and generated ways to make program services responsive to families. A national study of promising programs of education and support for parents found that programs maintain flexibility in program operations in order to be responsive to families "by meeting parents at a variety of locations and times and accommodating the 'temporary dropout' and re-entry of program families" (Goodson, Swartz, & Millsap, 1991).

There is growing awareness of the limitations of extending programs developed for middle-class populations to lower-income communities. The ecological perspective described earlier in this paper heightened attention to variations across populations and communities, and underscored the importance of understanding how cultural and community values influence child-rearing practices and beliefs.

Decisions about program methods often focus on home visiting versus group-based delivery strategies. There are unique advantages to each approach that often speak to the needs of a particular population. For example, home visiting is often viewed as superior to parent groups for reaching geographically and/or socially isolated parents. The design of Even Start enables local programs to build on the combined strengths of both approaches in working with parents. Group work enables parents to learn from one another, to form supportive relationships with their peers, to see how other parents respond to new information about children and parenting, and to view a range of developmental levels and competencies of children participating in a program. Home visiting can be used to refine the learnings of these experiences for parents. The main advantage of home visiting is the chance to individualize program content to the needs and characteristics of

parent and child. General information can be tailored in a home visit. It also is a rich opportunity for staff to learn about parenting issues and needs that should shape the focus of a group.

Some parenting programs have moved into nontraditional settings for reaching hard-to-reach populations. One example of this approach is the Detroit Family Project's use of waiting rooms in health clinics to provide parent education to low-income families. Project staff lead discussions on a variety of topics in clinics providing obstetrics and gynecology, WIC, adolescent and pediatric health services. Waiting time in these clinics typically is two or more hours. Facilitators are encouraged to engage participants' interests and attention, using curriculum material and presentation style as tools for demonstrating that captive time in a waiting room can be enjoyable as well as relevant to their interests and experiences. One facilitator reports that "We didn't preach to people. We didn't sit down and teach them a class. We asked for their participation, and we listened to what they had to say, and that is what made it so interesting." Among other topics, facilitators are trained in the challenges of leading a parent group discussion in often inhospitable circumstances.

A health clinic waiting room also was found to be a useful place for connecting to low-income Latinas of Mexican origin in the Los Angeles area. This group-based initiative was launched by the MELD program after research showed that low-income Mexican immigrant mothers would be reluctant to participate in a parent program involving group meetings attended by unfamiliar individuals (Powell, Zambrana, & Silva-Palacios, 1990).

Decisions about what methods to use with a population can focus on characteristics of a specific population of parents. The waiting room programs are illustrative of this approach. Decisions about methods also can stem from information about the needs of a particular parent or family. Thoughtful needs assessment work that involves the parent as a collaborator can be useful in this regard.

Parent education methods are not limited to group-based versus home visiting approaches. The nature of interactions with parents can range from highly structured, didactic styles to facilitation of parent exploration of open-ended questions about parenting. These diverse options for interacting with parents need to be considered in relation to understandings about interaction styles and preferences of a population.

The task of matching program interaction style to the preferences of a population is illustrated in the growing literature on parent education programs for fathers. This literature notes that a common shortcoming of existing programs for fathers is that they are patterned after programs designed for mothers, often ignoring differences in learning styles and ways of relating to peers. Program styles of helping that are compatible with men's problem-solving strategies – typically based more on information than on feelings or strong affect – are recommended (Minnesota Fathering Alliance, 1992). Many fathers want information, not a "bull session," and may view group work or exercises as gimmicks (Bowman, 1992). The above description of fathers is an illustration only. Extreme caution must be used in generalizing about a population; there is a point when general statements become stereotypes. What is more, general patterns or characteristics in a population at large may not hold true for a particular set of the larger population in an Even Start program.

Example: Because Even Start is designed for low-income populations, it is useful to consider how the type of participant recruitment technique used by a program is related to the type of parent agreeing to participate in a program. This example comes from

the Child and Family Resource Program, the focus of the "kitchen talk" study described earlier in this paper.

In the beginning months of the program, the primary recruitment technique was the dissemination of brochures about the program throughout program's target neighborhood. This recruitment strategy attracted the interest of socially skilled, assertive parents who were actively looking for some type of activity (not necessarily a parent program) to pursue outside the home. It was a case of "parents finding the program rather than the program finding parents" (Powell, 1988, p. 129). This passive recruitment strategy, however, did not reach the vast majority of parents who joined the program. It became necessary to seek out the names of prospective participants and to engage in one-on-one contact with potential participants, generally in their homes. Slightly more than one-third of the parents who joined the program received services through home visiting alone before attending their first group meeting.

Not surprisingly, a national study of promising programs for low-income parents found the programs use person-to-person methods to encourage hard-to-reach families to participate. These methods included program staff talking with key people in a community about the program, and making personal connections with churches, housing projects, health clinics, and other settings where potential participants are located (Goodson, Swartz, & Millsap, 1991).

Maintain Balanced Focus

In a comprehensive family literacy program such as Even Start, parenting matters need to be addressed along with a host of other adult and family issues. For staff working with parents on parenting topics, the challenge is to maintain a focus on parenting while also actively acknowledging other pressing circumstances. Listen to the words of one home visitor: "If a mother isn't making it financially, and she's just had a fight with her boyfriend, and he's just split, there ain't no way I can just say to her, 'OK, let's you and I go play a game with the child'" (Mindick, 1986, p. 83). Similarly, a University of Washington program focused on at-risk mothers found it useful to focus in dual manner on both child-rearing knowledge and adult social skills rather than treat the two separately (Booth, Mitchell, Barnard, & Spieker, 1989).

There is risk in short changing or ignoring parenting issues, however, because this may lead to limited to no program effects on the child. The evaluation results of Head Start's Child and Family Resource Program may be interpreted as suggesting that family circumstances, but not child outcomes, were improved by the program because the content of home visits focused almost exclusively on family needs (Travers, Nauta, & Irwin, 1982).

By design, Even Start is able to deal with a range of pressing family issues because there are program components focused on different dimensions of individual and family functioning. The task is to channel parent interests in the appropriate direction so the primary intent of a specific component such as parenting is not diluted, while at the same time not ignoring the expressed concerns of parents.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAM MANAGERS

What does all of this mean for the manager of an Even Start program? Here are some guidelines that stem from the material reviewed above:

Develop Program Experiences.

Opportunities for parents to learn about parenting need to be developed within a specific program, and not imposed without careful review from an external source. Good programs know their populations well and develop experiences based on these understandings. A prepackaged parenting curriculum may not be the most effective way to think about programming for parent education.

Reach for Content Breadth and Depth.

An Even Start program's attention to parenting must encompass breadth as well as depth. The breadth of content is described in this paper's review of the five areas of parent influence on children's intellectual competence. Together these areas representing a pattern of parenting; good things go together. Yet each area needs in-depth attention as well. For example, it is not sufficient for a program to promote the message "read with your child" without providing opportunities for parents to know how. If a parent education curriculum is to be adopted by a program, a useful set of criteria for determining the adequacy of program content is the description of the five areas of parent influence on children's learning, described earlier in this paper.

Include Children.

Even Start has the opportunity to include children in a significant way as catalysts for adult learning. Good programs maximize opportunities for parents to observe and interact with a children representing a range of ages and developmental abilities. This also provides parents with the chance to observe how other adults, including staff, interact with children ("Wow, look how she got that kid to calm down!").

Know the Parents Well.

Developing program content and methods to meet the needs of an Even Start population requires in-depth understanding of parents and their situations. Use focus groups, surveys, interviews, advisory committees, informal observation of parents at group meetings, and input from parents during home visits to form a general program impression of parents. This needs to be done on an on-going basis because as trust builds with a program more information comes forward from parents. The first snapshot is not always the best picture.

Be Flexible Yet Intentional.

It is the program manager that often must nudge a staff beyond a "one size fits all" approach to working with families. Staff will use the professional tools they know best. A program manager's task is to support staff in learning alternative ways of reaching individuals. Yet care must be taken that a "whatever it takes" mentality does not come at the sacrifice of informed, thoughtful approaches. Good professionals are intentional in their actions. Encourage staff to reflect critically on why they do what they do.

Enable Staff Development.

Individualized work with families cannot occur when caseloads are unreasonable or when family crises repeatedly occupy the time of one staff person alone. Program managers need to frequently review caseloads and the equity of assignments involving particularly demanding situations. Program managers also need to help staff carve out program time for consultations about cases of con-

cern, training, and a general marshaling of program energies. A general principle here is that staff need the same types of experiences that the program seeks to provide parents (for example, the legitimate chance to talk about what is important).

Respect and Grow From What Parents Bring.

Good programs begin with recognition and respect for the gifts or strengths that parents bring to a program. Even Start is not a one-way street, where a program does something on families. It is a dynamic enterprise where parents are partners and staff have the potential to grow as well. It may be useful for staff to periodically answer such questions as, How are we growing and developing through our work with parents? How are the insights of parents also helpful to us as individuals and as parents? A program works best when it is a true community of learners.

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Bridges to Literacy: Children, Families, and Schools. Edited by David K. Dickinson. 1994. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers.
This volume provides an up-to-date overview of recent research related to literacy, with special focus on family literacy programs. There are 13 chapters, most focused on program strategies for enhancing adult and child literacy. Topics pertinent to Even Start include directions in literacy intervention programs, methods and effects of story reading, parent involvement, adults as learners, collaborations, and evaluation issues. Order from Blackwell Publishers, 238 Main Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02142

Building Villages to Raise Our Children. Series Editors: J. Anne Pender and Katherine Wrean 1993. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project.
This is a set of six guides aimed at helping programs establish caring communities that provide children with a healthy start through a network of supportive and comprehensive services for families. There are practical suggestions based on the experiences of many programs plus descriptions of typical problems and the ways practitioners have selected to resolve them. The series examines five topics in depth: collaboration, funding and resources, evaluation, community outreach, and staffing. Order from Harvard Family Research Project, Longfellow Hall, Appian Way, Cambridge, MA 02138

Enabling Young Children to Succeed in School. By Douglas R. Powell. 1995. Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.
This monograph summarizes what is known from research about factors influencing young children's early school success. Detailed attention is given to definitions and measurement of school readiness, and to the contributions of early childhood programs, families, and schools to early school success. The monograph identifies five key points of departure for developing practices and policies aimed at maximizing the importance of the early years. The first chapter provides a succinct summary of research evidence, which draws on findings from nearly 200 studies. Order from the American Educational Research Association, 1230 17th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036-3078.

Families and Early Childhood Programs. By Douglas R. Powell. 1989. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.
This monograph provides a detailed synthesis of research on relationships between families and programs of early education and care. Changing contexts and rationales for parent-staff relationships are described, and family program connections are considered from the perspectives of children and of adults. There also is a chapter on parent education and support programs. Order from the National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1509 16th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036-1426.

Family Resource Coalition (FRC).
Family Resource Coalition is a membership organization dedicated to communicating the premise, promise and practice of family support. FRC maintains an extensive publications catalog and the large database on family support programs. The Coalition also operates the National Resource Center for Family Support programs. For more information, contact FRC at 200 South Michigan Avenue, Suite 1520, Chicago, Illinois 60604 or (312) 341-0900.

MELD (formerly Minnesota Early Learning Design)
MELD Central is a nationally recognized and replicated agency that has served parents and parent educators since 1973. MELD's materials and training opportunities are designed to build the capacity of community-based programs to implement successful, respectful programs for economically and culturally diverse parents. Materials targeted at parents of infants

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and toddlers, teen mothers and young fathers are particularly helpful resources. For more information, contact MELD at 123 North Third Street, Suite 507, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55401 or (612) 332-7563.

National Extension Parent Education Model of Critical Parenting Practices. 1994. Manhattan, KS: Cooperative Extension Service, Kansas State University.

This model recommends parent education programs focus on five content areas: care for self, understanding, guiding, nurturing, motivating, and advocating. It was developed by four Cooperative Extension specialists. The report includes background information on how the model was created, and describes assumptions, guiding principles, and examples of potential program objectives. It also describes Cooperative Extension resources that are compatible with the model. Order from NEPEM, Kansas State University, 343 Justin Hall, Manhattan, KS 66506-1423

Paths to School Readiness: An In-Depth Look at Three Early Childhood Programs. By M. Elena Lopez and Mona R. Hochberg. 1993. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project.

This monograph describes three exemplary early childhood programs that provide comprehensive family support. The programs differ in their methods of service delivery, but each tailored its services to community conditions and built on locally available expertise. The programs are located in Vermont, Colorado, and Florida. The monograph describes pathways to program development, collaboration strategies, services for children and parents, staffing patterns, and funding streams. Each chapter concludes with a set of lessons for practitioners. Order from Harvard Family Research Project, Longfellow Hall, Appian Way, Cambridge, MA 02138

Putting Families First: America's Family Support Movement and the Challenge of Change. Edited by Sharon L. Kagan and Bernice Weissbourd. 1994. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, Inc.

This volume includes 20 chapters on the state of family support programs in the U.S., including an examination of current principles and practices. Chapters pertinent to Even Start programs include attention to relations between home and school, family support programs in black churches, diversity, community development, definitions of program quality, an update on program evaluation trends, and the training and supervision of workers in family support programs. Order from Jossey-Bass, Inc. 350 Sansome Street, San Francisco, CA 94104